1950

griffith churches

METHODISM IN GRIFFITH

Methodism in Griffith is as old as the town. It was in 1893--the year that marked the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America and also the year the World's Fair made the city of Chicago famous--that the Northwest Indiana Conference appointed two supply pastors to the open country lying about ten miles southeast of Hammond. In that year three men from Chicago purchased a vast acreage of land centering about the intersection of five railroads which cross the main street within a distance of one block. One of these men was a Mr. Griffith, from whom the town gets its name.

The Rev. E.T. Gorge and Rev. A.W. Smith came as supply pastors to the community. There is no record of their work other than the appointments in the Conference Minutes. In those early days services were held in homes, storerooms, and later in the Town Hall. The records indicate that the "first Class" was organized about 1914, under the leadership of the Rev. Roy O. Hills, a student from Garrett Biblical Institute.

In 1917, there were sixteen members on the roll. These were Wm. Penning, Mrs. Emma Penning-Todd, Mr. and Mrs. Sam Lightfoot, Mr. & Mrs. Ferd Bennett, Warren Bennett, Mrs. Robert Watkins (now Mrs. Donn Chalfant), Robert Watkins, Raymond Watkins, Alvin Watkins, Clayton Watkins,(sons of Mr. & Mrs. Robert Watkins), Adolph Penning, Margaret Bennett, Mrs. Earl Butler and Louis Southworth. The church was part of the Merrillville Circuit at that time.

In the Conference Minutes of 1916 the district superintendent, Dr. M.H. Appleby, made the following report: "The new church at Griffith was dedicated by the superintendent, Sunday, April 16th (1916) amid rejoicing of a small but heroic congregation. This was a triumph of faithful, self-sacrificing labors on the part of the pastor, Rev. R.O. Hills, and the church. The people have generously and cheerfully given the amount

needed to clear the building of debt, and the dedication services crowned the day. Much credit must be given to the Ladies' Aid Society and to the citizens of the village whose support made the work possible and whose interest was undiminished through all the vicissitudes through which the enterprise passed."

The building, located at the corner of Lafayette Avenue and Columbia Street, was finished with stucco. It consisted of a basement, two classrooms, and a sanctuary. The cost of construction was about $5,000. The Mission Board gave aid by contributing $600 in cash. This building burned to the ground in 1919, leaving this struggling and courageous congregation without a place to worship. At that time there were 18 members, and the Church School had an enrollment of 65. Three of the charter members remain on the roll as active members. These are Wm. Penning, Mrs. Emma Penning-Todd (deceased 1955)and Mrs. Nellie Butler.

For three years the congregation was again compelled to worship in some store building or in the Town Hall. The church remained a part of the Merrillville Circuit. In August of 1919 a letter was addressed to the Board of Missions, pleading for aid. The following is a quotation from this letter: "I am writing a most urgent appeal. Our church burned last week. This is a calamity to this little town. (The population in 1919 was about 600). It is a student supply with the small town of Merrillville. Griffith is an important little railroad town with just a few church people, and our church is the only one ministering to a needy community".

The determination of a "few church people" is well illustrated by the action taken by the Ladies' Aid Society. Mrs. C.W. Bothwell was president of the organization at the time. A quotation from the minutes of their meeting reads as follows: "It was moved and carried (by the eight members present) that the Aid pledge $1,000 payable in three years from

date. It was also moved and carried that $150, the amount on hand in the treasury, be paid at once."

The Official Board purchased a new site on Broad Street and Columbia, opposite the property of the Public School. This property had a frontage of 125 feet on both streets. The following Trustees for the church were elected August 1, 1920; Warner F. Christenson, William Penning, Dr. and Mrs. F.A. Malmstone, and James Scott. Dr. Henry L. Davis was district superintendent at that time. On August 18, 1921 the Trustees entered into contract with J. Wesley Reed of Hammond to furnish plans and specifications for the new church building and also to supervise the construction of said building in the capacity of contractor."

This was a T-shaped building, finished in brick. The Sanctuary, with open chancel, has a seating capacity of about 200. The rear section section consists of a dining room, kitchen, and an entrance hall. The second floor has three classrooms used by the Nursery and Kindergarten Departments, and an Intermediate Class. The basement has three classrooms now used by the Primary Department and a furnace room. The cost of this building was around $15,000.

The Conference Minutes of 1922 report: "A beautiful and commodius church at Griffith was dedicated by Bishop F.D. Leete, February 12th. Brother Robert S. McCutcheon, the pastor, directed the work. Griffith will be a station next year, and Brother McCutcheon, transferred to the Conference, will continue as pastor." Dr. W.E. McKenzie was then District Superintendent. The Minutes of that year report 61 members on the roll and 122 pupils in the Church School. Mrs. J.R. Clark was Church School Superintendent. Griffith was growing rapidly, and the population was nearly 1,000.

The longest pastorate was that of the Rev. G.A. Trodie, who served the church from 1936 to 1943. During this period two noteworthy achievements

were accomplished. By a well-organized campaign seventy-five people contributed to a fund of $1,500, with which a beautiful two manual Hammond Electric Organ was purchased and installed in the Sanctuary. This organ together with the efficient work of the organist, Mrs. Ruth Price-Vierk, has made an unusual contribution to the worship services.

Another accomplishment marked up during this pastorate was the building of the beautiful six-room parsonage, one block east of the church on North Lafayette Avenue. This building is a brick veneer with a stone front. It is thoroughly modern in every respect, with hardwood floors, a fine fireplace, and beautifully landscaped with shrubs and a large lawn. This parsonage was built by the Christenson Construction Company. The cost in the "good old days" was $7,500. Today the building is valued at $15,000.

In the autumn of 1945, the Rev. Harold K. Joyce became pastor of the church. The following year a third building program was started. A financial campaign followed with a net subscription of $12,000. An architect was employed and he made some preliminary sketches for additional equipment.

The next year (1947) there was a change of pastors, and the Rev. Marion C. Bishop came to the church. Sometime during the following year the building program was revised. Another architect was employed, and the church entered into a contract with Dr. Frank Inman of the Board of Missions to carry on a financial campaign. This was done in May 1949, and the total amount in cash and pledges was nearly $17,000. Late in the fall another change was made, and Roy Christenson was employed as architect. The plans were completed the next spring and construction began about the middle of July. Only the basement walls were completed by fall, as an early winter made further construction impossible until spring.

This addition consists of two units. One section, which connects with the west end of the old building, has a basement, dining room, a chapel on the first floor, a Nursery room, Kindergarten Dept., class room, church office, the pastor's study, and two restrooms. This first unit is of steel and cement construction faced with Bedford rock. The windows are cathedral art glass with ecclesiastical symbols. North of the old building and connecting with the new section to the west is a basement containing a large kitchen, club room, class room, and the furnace room. At a later date two stories will be added above this basement, in which will be the chancel, class rooms, the Primary Department, and restrooms. This will increase the seating capacity of the Sanctuary to about 425. This addition will cost about $70,000 and will increase the valuation of the building to approximately $100,000.

This church has a unique program for Sunday activities. During the pastorate of the Rev. J.K. Milnes, 1931-1935, a unified worship program was organized. The church has been so well-pleased with this plan, and results have been so constructive, that there could be no thought of a change. The membership at the time of the 1952 Annual Conference will be about 575 resident active members. In the past five years 356 members have been added to the church roll. This is a larger number than the total membership reported to the Annual Conference in 1947. The church school has an enrollment of about 250. The high attendance for the church school during the present year was 218 on a given Sunday. The worship service attendance reached the peak on Easter Sunday with a few over 460.

The present congregation is made up very largely of young people. The probable average age of the usual Sunday morning congregation is less than 40 years. Many are college graduates. Several members in industry have advanced degrees in the field of chemistry. Many of the teachers in the church school have had special training in teaching, some in the

rank of college. Mr. Herbert Book is the general superintendent of the church school. Two former superintendents are Mr. Stanley Davis and Mr. Rex Beaty, the latter serving for more than 12 years.

The oldest member is Mr. Sam B. Woods, who boasts of his 95 years--all spent in Lake County.

The program of the Unification of Methodism brought about the union of the Missionary Society and the Ladies' Aid Society into the Women's Society of Christian Service. The present membership is about 75 in the general Society and many more in the four Circles formed for a more practical working force. During the last two years the Society has raised and paid $2,000 into the Building Fund. In addition to this, the Society has given support to all the Missionary work at home and abroad.

Mrs. John McKenna is the present president.